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ABSTRACT

The Artifact Kits program, which centers on the presentation of two collections of local history artifacts by local university undergraduate students to children in the community elementary schools, is designed to meet three educational needs of the community: the museum's responsibility for broad dissemination of the community heritage, practical training of prospective social studies teachers, and the enrichment of the elementary school social studies curriculum. This multi-level project integrating several existing but separate educational resources concentrated on fourth-grade students, who were given not only an introduction to their regional cultural heritage, but also an opportunity to handle the artifacts, thereby generating greater interest and making a more lasting impression than would be realized by more conventional methods. At the same time, the university students received valuable teaching experience and the museum gained by stimulation of student interest in its collections. (Author/RAA)

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A CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM: THE PRESENTATION OF MUSEUM ARTIFACT KITS IN COMMUNITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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by

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Local and regional museums have a venerable place in most of the nation's communities, and their role in the educational life of these localities has long been recognized, if only as an obligatory field trip for students to view the relics left by their ancestors. But it has been an equally long frustration for young visitors and museum educators alike that the artifacts often so fascinatingly displayed have remained out of reach, kept enshrined beyond the sense of touch so important particularly for children yearning to discover texture, weight, intricacies, and composition. Even when curatorial concerns have been satisfied, small staffs, logistical problems, field-trip time limits, and modest funds usually discourage the local museum's efforts to overcome this common frustration. But a collaborative effort by several community institutions can provide a productive and exciting answer to this and other needs.

In St. Joseph County, Indiana, one such collaborative educational program, which we have entitled "Indians and Pioneers," has been developed jointly by the museum of the Northern Indiana Historical Society and Indiana University at South Bend, in cooperation with the county's several public, parochial and private school systems. The program is a multi-faceted approach to the museum's educational function and is designed to meet the following needs: the museum's responsibility to disseminate broadly and effectively the rich heritage of its collection, the practical training of prospective teachers in social studies, and the enrichment of the elementary school social studies curriculum. Unlike traditional museum "kits," which usually are small and either are sent to the classroom as static

displays or are provided to teachers with a meager set of instructions, the "Indians and Pioneers" program centers on the formal and detailed "hands-on" presentation of a rather large collection of artifacts in the classroom, usually of the fourth-grade level, by trained undergraduate education students.

In order to establish this "kits" program the museum had two principal tasks. The first was to assemble two artifact collections, one reflecting the culture of Native Americans of the lower Great Lakes region and the other that of the pioneer settlers of northern Indiana. These topics were chosen because of the emphasis each receives in the targeted curriculum level and the relative abundance of the appropriate items in the museum collection. The education coordinator and the curator together chose the artifacts that best illustrated the two cultures and, at the same time, were not likely to suffer damage and could be spared by the collection. In the "Indian Kit," for example, the items include numerous stone tools, rattles, a war club, pipes, pre- and post contact trade goods, examples of bead work, and animal pelts. In the "Pioneer Kit" were collected examples of lighting used in log homes, farm and domestic tools, household utensils, a musket, and cooking items. These artifacts were not assembled as displays, but were individually packed for travel in special cases destined for "hands-on" use in the elementary school classroom. Much to the curator's relief, it should be noted, our experience this year has shown that the children handled these artifacts with greater reverence than do most adults. In addition to the artifacts, each kit has also been supplied with twenty photographs which illustrate the various themes suggested by the items in the kits. These pictures serve at the same time as an additional teaching tool in the training of the kit presentors.

The museum's second major task was to train the university students in the handling, uses, and significance of the artifacts. The aim here was to create,

as much as possible, a self directed training unit. Having been divided into two groups, one for the Native American artifacts and the other for the pioneer kit, the education coordinator assigned selected advanced and fourth-grade readings, in addition to the studies contained in the manual for tour guides, which also was developed in conjunction with the project. One extended class for each group was then held by the education coordinator in the museum. The students' training was continued and augmented by the use of a slide/tape presentation of the kits' contents. This slide/tape instructional unit was produced jointly by the museum educator and the university instructor at very low cost, using the Kodak "Ektographic" system. The slide presentations were made available to the students through the university's Learning Resource Center. The students were required to plan their approach to the kit presentation and to be ready to do their work in the elementary schools by the final six weeks of the semester.

Having collaborated in the development of the kit training materials, the university had two additional responsiblilities. The first was the training of the students in the methodology of teaching social studies in the elementary school classroom. This was done through the university's social studies methods course, which is usually taken at the junior level by education majors and which concentrates on such topics as developing resource units, collecting free materials, using community resources, and creating thematic bulletin boards. By adding to their academic course the field experience component, that is to say, the kit program, the students were able to put to immediate and practical use the principles learned in the classroom, and, conversely, the student would bring to the kit presentation a sophisticated level of teaching expertise not always found in docent programs. Each student was required to give at least three kit presentations by the end of the semester. The university's second task was to serve as the logistical center for the program. At the university, where the students' activities were

centered, records of school and kit assignments, correspondence and other essential communication, and the kits themselves could be maintained with a minimum of administrative effort.

Although the logistical center of the program was established in the Division of Education of Indiana University at South Bend, the planning and handling of the different facets of this project have been jointly developed and operated by the university instructor and the museum's education coordinator. In order to make contact with the schools a brochure, designed, printed and distributed through the university was made available to each of the 168 fourth-grade teachers in the elementary schools of St. Joseph County. To save mailing costs many of the teachers could be reached through the various school corporations' own internal mailing systems. Teachers returned the "reservation form" to the museum's education coordinator, indicating which kit they wished to have and the days and times of the week best suited to their schedules. Students were then matched by the universtiy instructor with teachers who had requested the kits. A form letter informed the teachers of the name of the student assigned to that teacher's class. It was then the responsiblility of the university students to initiate contact and schedule the classroom kit presentation. After contacting the teacher and determining an available date and time, the student entered the scheduled visit in the "master schedule book," thus reserving a time for the kit's use. The teacher was sent a confirmation of the scheduled visit as well as copies of the evaluation instrument, developed by the university instructor, and a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope for its return. Students also received a copy of this letter as well as the evaluation instrument. Both the teacher and the student completed and returned copies of the evaluation instrument to the university instructor. The results of these evaluations are currently being processed through the university's computer center and will be used in this coming year's

analysis of the entire project.

A kit presentation, typically, lasts for one and half to two hours and the teaching method centers on a high level of interaction between students and the teacher. The presentor uses the artifacts to develop or illustrate various basic social studies topics, such as distance in time, environmental relationships, family, community, work, spirituality, invention, craftsmanship, sex roles, age roles, and so forth. Although mostly this is done through the systematic examination of the artifacts, where possible the children also try their hand at certain tasks, such as grinding corn or coffee, or hackling flax. In some cases a presentor has dressed for the part or even made a second trip to a classroom, bringing traditional or unusual foods, such as stone-ground corn bread or fried racoon meat for the children to sample. Such a presentation, our preliminary findings show, invariably results in a highly positive learning experience for the fourth-graders and an equally positive teaching experience for the prospective teacher.

As an adjunct component of the kit program the university students were also required to lead a fourth-grade class in a formal tour of the museum itself. Preparation for the tour was carried out in much the same fashion as that for the kit program, with the exception that all logistical matters were handled by the museum. Ideally, the university students would arrange a tour in the museum for one of the classes in which their kit was presented. Although this was not always possible because of difficulties in transportation or other scheduling in the schools, the tour facet of the program has been a valued component and has served three important purposes relative to the basic aims of the kit program: to provide the museum with a number of well trained tour guides and a pool of prospective teachers who could use the museum on their own or participate in future collaborative programs; to give the education student a first experience in a

field trip and the actual uses of community resources; and to give the visiting children a more effective and stimulating experience in the museum.

The cost of the kit program has been minimal, yet preliminary statistics show that its impact this past year has been significant. Most of the cost, less than one hundred and fifty dollars, was incurred by the process of establishing the program: photographs printed and mounted, packing materials for the kits, the slide/tape teaching units, and an initial mailing cost to individual teachers. Once the program was launched, however, costs have been limited to resupply of such things as dried corn, flax and coffee, the printing of brochures and correspondence, and the postage to reach a handful of teachers not covered by the school systems' internal mailing distribution. Some initial statistics give an indication of the project's impact in its first year of operation. 74% of the elementary schools in St. Joseph County were served; of the 168 fourth-grade classes 105 had a kit presentation, that is to say, nearly 2600 children were able to participate in this unique learning experience in their own classrooms. More detailed and analytical data of the educational impact of the program will be forthcoming, by December 1981, but all early and informal responses have been very positive.

In sum, this first year of the "Indians and Pioneers" kit program has been rewarding and productive. Not only were the fourth-grade students given an extended and detailed introduction to the evidence of past cultures of their own region, but, more importantly, they also were given the opportunity to handle the artifacts, an experience which generated greater interest and more lasting impressions than realized by more conventional uses of artifacts. By this same exercise, the university students were given valuable and, in the state of Indiana, mandatory practical teaching experience in the classroom and in the field. The collaborative nature of this multi-level program benefitted the museum as well by

enabling the operation of a broad, effective, and community related educational program beyond the confines of the museum, at low cost and within the limitations of a small staff. In addition, the museum is served by stimulating new community interest, giving greater significance to the traditional museum visit, and by increasing the number of volunteers offering their services and the number of teachers using the museum as a learning resource.

In closing, the museum educator and the university instructor would like to express their gratitude for the support and constant assistance of the Director of the Northern Indiana Historical Society museum, Mr. James C. Sullivan, and the Chairman of the Division of Education of Indiana University at South Bend, Dr. Wayne Krepel.

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